

The World's First Great War In the Air



Air Fleets In a Death Grapple.

German, French, British and Russian Aeroplanes and
Dirigibles Battling Among the Clouds.

BATTLES in the air! Aeroplanes darting at dirigible balloons, piercing their thin envelopes and exploding their gasoline tanks until attacker and attacked fall to death! Maddened with the war fury, the aviator is glad to die, if so he can but take with him the enemy who disputes with him the mastery of the atmosphere.

War in the air is a reality. Long the dream of the poet and novelist who "saw red" in the glare of the sun, it has in the present European war fulfilled all the dread prophecies that have been made about it. The military aviator, circling ever upward and outward in his search for his foe, has come upon him in the upper reaches of the air. There have been sharp, short skirmishes for position, each man intent upon guiding his own machine aright and seeking to deal a deathblow to the other's aeroplane. Speed up the propeller, feed the engine to the last ounce of power! There he is, circling around and looking for you. And then, in the last fatal dash, drive the nose of your machine into him! Your planes lock and tangle in a mortal embrace—you fall, thousands and thousands of feet—but before you land you have the fierce consciousness of having dragged your foe with you to death!

Already we have had such cases. And we have had, too, the stories of the gun and the rifle on land tilted until they pointed almost to the zenith, sending shell or bullet into aeroplanes and the dirigible balloons and bringing them down to the ground with their occupants in a helpless, shapeless mass.

Men are fighting with guns on land and sea and in the air. The last unfilled element has been made to serve the purposes of slaughter. Aeroplanes and dirigibles carry guns especially designed for waging aerial battles and bombs for dropping from the heights on armies and cities.

All the great fighting powers of Europe are playing at the dreadful, deadly aerial fighting game. Great Britain, France and Russia send their hopes aloft in aeroplanes. Germany and Austria spread their faith abroad on the heavens in monster dirigible balloons. Of the heavier than air flying machines Great Britain has 400, France 1,100 and Russia 800. To Germany is credited the ownership of 1,000, and Austria-Hungary has about 400.

In dirigibles Germany is richer than any other country, thanks to the efforts of Zeppelin, Parseval and others. She has thirty "battle airships," while France has only twenty and Great Britain seven. Austria-Hungary planned to build six, but that was before the great war began. Just how far they are toward completion no one knows but the Austrian general staff. And its members will not tell.

